

## **Assignment 1: What is a life of significance?**

**Goal:** Write an essay (4-5 pages) in which you draw from your experiences and the readings, podcasts, and other materials we have examined as a class to answer the question, what does it mean to live a life of significance? By what criteria or measure might we judge a life as significant? What are the qualities, characteristics, actions, and attitudes associated with such a life?

**Role:** As a new member to a community that values living a life of significance, your job is to articulate for yourself and for others in your community your understanding of what it means to live a life of significance. There is no one way to answer the question. Your contribution adds to and enriches the perspectives on the core question for this group.

**Audience:** Your audience includes new and current members of the Birmingham-Southern Community. This community has not prescribed a specific definition for living a life of significance. For this reason, you want to clarify for yourself and for other members of this group—as best you can—how you understand what it is live a life of significance.

**Situation/Challenge:** The challenge involves examining your own experiences and observations as well as the readings, podcasts, and other materials we have considered as a class to develop and articulate what you think it means to live a life of significance. Put these course materials in dialogue with your own experiences to develop an answer. You will need to distill a complex set of materials into three or four principles, features, or elements that constitute, in your view, living a life of significance. What are the qualities or features of such a life? What does such a life look like? How or in what way is it lived? Must one, for example, be famous or can one be relatively unknown? Does one have to have a “big” impact or can one’s direct impact be small? How or in what ways does one approach failure? How does one relate to or interact with others? What kind of work does one engage, including work in careers and communities? What sort of relationships does one establish with different groups?

While all sections of IDS 142 are producing a similar assignment, the readings or materials against which you should position your reflections may be unique to your section of the class.

**Product/Performance:** Produce an essay of approximately 4-5 pages in which you articulate three or four criteria, features, qualities, or tension points (or paradoxes) of a life of significance. In your essay, provide a rationale for what you identify and use your own experiences and observations (including materials we have examined as a class) to support your conclusions or any remaining questions you may have.

**Standards:** An effective essay will articulate four or so conclusions based on your analysis and consideration of your own experiences and our shared materials as a class. It will provide evidence and justification for those conclusions and address any alternative points of view. The essay need not be definitive, and in fact may raise more questions than it answers so long as it has articulated a set of principles, characteristics, tension points, or paradoxes about living a life

of significance as you are coming to understand it. (Put differently, one could argue that living such a life is impossible for the following reasons, or that living such a life requires navigating six tensions)